



ERIC WHITACRE'S VIRTUAL SCHOOL

CHAPTER 11: WALKTHROUGH – THE GIFT OF THE MAGI

Putting it together

Student Guide – Curiosity Edition



Introduction

This video will help you gain insight into hearing how “form” is constructed as in Eric’s opera *The Gift of the Magi*. You will explore ideas that will help you understand how pop songs and other short forms are put together.

In Chapter 11, Eric discusses a work in process, his chamber opera *The Gift of the Magi*, based on a short story by the American writer, O. Henry, published in 1905. He reviews several aspects of composition discussed in this masterclass: 1)

Emotional architecture; 2) the Golden Brick; 3) Lyrics and 4) Voice, referencing his inner world of sound, demonstrating with a duet from the opera. He discusses the “hook” – a term more often used in pop music – and demonstrates how the hook illuminates the music and creates the Emotional Architecture of the work. Ultimately, Eric says, he writes “what I want to listen to,” and by doing that, he displays his authentic voice, and invites the audience to join that emotional journey.

Works referenced in this video:

- *The Gift of the Magi*: no recording available yet
- *little tree*: <https://youtu.be/hokPwKzu0YI>

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

Form

Pop song structure

Discussion, Discovery and Insight

How do you listen for “form” in music?

What are the most common musical forms?

Putting it together

1. Watch this video about musical form on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/6kCfycgW9Wc>

Did you know about what “form” in music was before you viewed this video, or the video by Eric Whitacre? Explain your thoughts. Why do you think musical form is an important part of the experience of music?

2. Listen to a song that you know and like that is popular right now. When you listen, can you hear the two major sections of the form called the “verse” and the “chorus”? To figure out which part is the “chorus” listen for a section of the song that repeats exactly, with the same words and the same music. If you hear a part that uses different words to the same music when it repeats, that is probably a “verse.” Try to map your song on paper using the words “verse” and “chorus” as you listen. Many songs will end up looking like this:

VERSE, CHORUS, VERSE, CHORUS, CHORUS

Perhaps you hear a section that is completely different from the sections you identified as verse and chorus. If so, that could be a third section called a “Bridge.” See if you can find a song with this form:

VERSE, CHORUS, VERSE, CHORUS, BRIDGE, CHORUS

If you notice a short section at the very beginning of the song that sets up the verse, that might be an “introduction” or “intro.” A section at the end that concludes the song is called an “outro” or a “coda.” Not all songs have them, but if your song does, make note of it.

3. As practice for your ears and musical perception, listen to the song “1, 2, 3, 4” by the Plain White T’s and see if you can follow the form as outlined below.

Listen: https://youtu.be/m6pW_q1PvH0

0’04”: Intro (pre-chorus material that sounds like the chorus later, but without words)

0’25”: Verse 1

0’50”: Chorus

1’12”: Verse 2

1’39”: Chorus

2’03”: Verse 3 (no words, instrumental but sounds like the melody of the verse)

2’28”: Chorus (guitar stops strumming for first half of the chorus)

2’50”: Outro (Like the Intro, but with some words from the chorus, and “I love you repeated”)

Reflection and Insights

Did you find it easy to hear and describe form in music? Why or why not? Describe your thinking. What could you do to hear form better?

Eric says he is composing his opera *The Gift of the Magi* with the Pop Song Structure: Intro, Verse 1, Hook 1 (Chorus), Verse 2, Hook 2, Bridge, Double Hook, Outro. Why do you think this particular form is so popular with pop artists and listeners?

Your style is like a favorite color or a favorite food. Only you know what you like and prefer. Would you say you are developing your unique style, or do you think that you already have a style and are learning better how to express it? Explain.

When you think of a favorite pop song you know, is your favorite part the “hook” or “chorus?” Does it make sense that the chorus is called the hook, especially if it sticks in your brain later? Why or why not?

Would you change this activity to better suit your learning style and interests? If so, describe how you would change it and why the adjustments would be better for you.
